

# SOUTH CAROLINA

## OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

### DIVISION OF FOSTER CARE REVIEW

#### 2004 - 2005 ANNUAL REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS



*CITIZENS  
ADVOCATING  
SAFETY  
AND  
PERMANENCE  
FOR  
CHILDREN*

#### **MISSION STATEMENT**

The Division of Foster Care Review provides an external system of **ACCOUNTABILITY** and **ADVOCACY** for children and families involved with the foster care system; utilizes panels of **COMMUNITY VOLUNTEERS** to **PROMOTE SAFE, PERMANENT HOMES** for children in foster care in a timely manner; and increases **PUBLIC AWARENESS** regarding the impact of child abuse and neglect.

# **INTRODUCTION AND HIGHLIGHTS**

## **FROM THE DIRECTOR . . .**

I am pleased to present the 2004-2005 Annual Report for the South Carolina Children's Foster Care Review Board. This report provides an in-depth look at the state of children in foster care in South Carolina (SC), as well as the dedication and commitment of the 164 Foster Care Review Board Members. I hope that you will read this report in its entirety. I am taking this opportunity to highlight some of the noteworthy activities of 2004.

- South Carolina's 38 local review boards conducted 8,410 reviews and held 441 meetings in 2004.
- Representatives from local review boards met quarterly with leaders from the county Department of Social Services, Guardian ad Litem Program and the Foster Parent Association to discuss the barriers to permanence for children in their counties.
- The State Board of Directors created two ad hoc committees in 2004 to develop and enhance public relations efforts and promote the visibility and impact of the Foster Care Review Board and its volunteers at the local, state, and national level. Both committees developed proposals and presented recommendations to the State Board of Directors for consideration.
- Ed Zielinski, from Review Board 10C, was named the "2004 Review Board Member of the Year." Through Ed's leadership, a positive difference was made for children in foster care in Anderson County.
- Local Review Board 11A was named the "2004 Review Board of the Year." Lisa Southworth, Laura Steele-Hibbs, Marjorie Mijares, Elizabeth Plasket and Teresa Rhymer were the first local review board members to establish routine contact with their local legislative delegation in regard to the issues impacting permanence for children in Lexington County.

Working together, we make a difference. Thank you for your support.

***DENISE T. BARKER***  
***DIVISION DIRECTOR***

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## **ABOUT THE DIVISION OF FOSTER CARE REVIEW**

SC was the first state to pass a law allowing citizens from each community to become involved in the child welfare system. Citizen volunteers review the cases of all children who spend longer than four consecutive months in foster care. After the first review, each child's case is reviewed every six months until the child is no longer in the custody of the Department of Social Services.

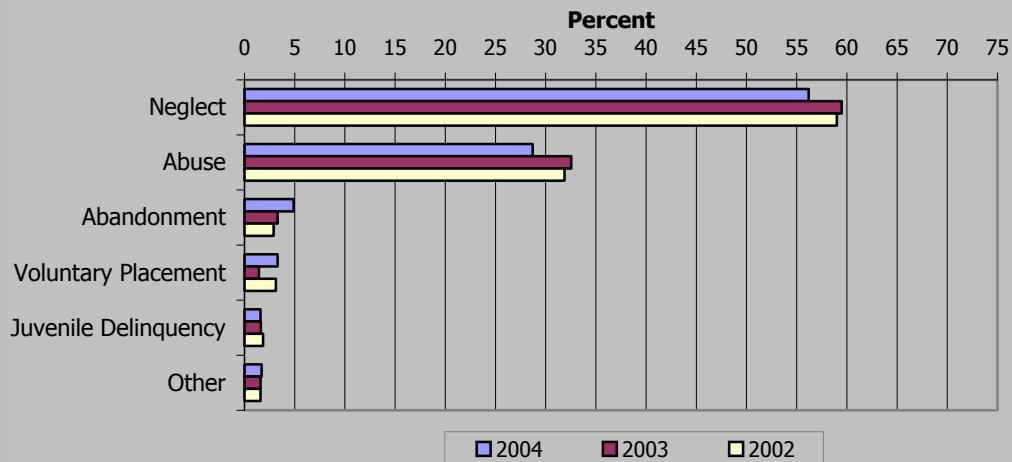
Following each review, a written recommendation is sent to the Family Court, the Department of Social Services and other interested parties. The objectives of foster care review are to promote safety and permanence so that children do not grow up in foster care; to identify gaps in services to children and families; and to promote public awareness regarding child abuse and neglect.

Each of South Carolina's sixteen judicial circuits must have at least one local review board. Currently there are 38 local foster care review boards serving 4,802 children. Most local review boards meet monthly to review the cases of children in foster care. Each local review board has five members, who are appointed by the Governor, upon the recommendation of the local legislative delegation. All local review board members are trained and supported by professional staff within the Division of Foster Care Review.

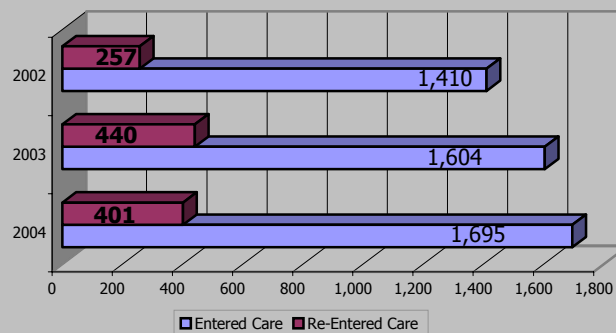
## CHILDREN ENTERING FOSTER CARE

In 2004, 1,695 children entered foster care and were reviewed by the Foster Care Review Board, a 17% increase since 2002. Neglect remains the primary reason that most children enter foster care. In 2004, 56% of children entered foster care due to neglect, and 29% entered due to abuse. Those entering foster care in 2004 were almost evenly divided by race and sex. Nearly 60% of children entering foster care in 2004 were age 9 and younger, and only 6% were age 16 and older.

### CHILDREN ENTERING FOSTER CARE BY PLACEMENT REASON



Of the 1,695 children entering foster care and reviewed in 2004, 24% had been in foster care previously. Historical data indicates that the vast majority of the children who re-enter foster care return from the home of a parent or relative, with only a small number returning to foster care after adoption.



### Three Year Comparison Entries and Re-Entries



Re-Entries by Previous Location	2004		2003		2002	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Adoption	17	4%	21	5%	10	4%
Parent	236	59%	240	54%	153	60%
Relative	117	29%	153	35%	79	31%
Other	31	8%	26	6%	13	5%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>401</b>		<b>440</b>		<b>257</b>	

## CHILDREN LEAVING FOSTER CARE

During 2004, 1,559 children, who were reviewed at least once, left foster care. The largest percentage of children (36%) returned to a birth parent, followed by 25% who were emancipated. Since 2002, there has been a 14% increase in the number of children leaving foster care through emancipation, and a 24% decrease in the number of children returning to a parent. Of the children who left foster care in 2004, 33% were age 16 or older. Slightly more girls left care than boys, and more African-American and other minorities left than Caucasians. Slightly more than half of the children experienced less than three foster care placements.

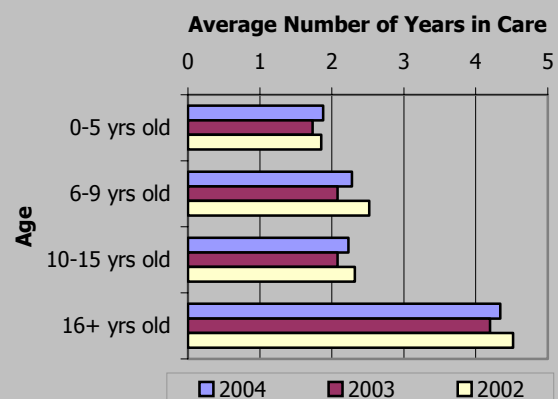
Children Leaving Foster Care	2004	2003	2002
TOTAL NUMBER	1,559	1,448	1,639
Percent Adopted	24%	21%	23%
Percent Returned Home	36%	37%	41%
Percent Emancipated	25%	26%	20%
Percent Living with Relative	16%	16%	14%

Twenty-one percent (21%) of the children who left foster care in 2004, left from a therapeutic foster home or a residential facility funded by Medicaid. Since 2002, there has been an 11% increase in the number of children who leave foster care from a therapeutic placement. In 2004, 55% of the children who left foster care from a therapeutic placement were emancipated, 33% returned to a parent, while only 3% were adopted.

Children Leaving Care	2004		2003		2002	
	Regular	Medicaid	Regular	Medicaid	Regular	Medicaid
TOTAL	1,239 (79%)	320 (21%)	1,172 (81%)	276 (19%)	1,357 (83%)	282 (17%)
% Adopted	29%	3%	24%	4%	26%	6%
% Returned to Parent	36%	33%	41%	26%	43%	36%
% Emancipated	17%	55%	18%	61%	15%	48%
% Relative	17%	9%	17%	8%	15%	9%

### AVERAGE NUMBER OF YEARS IN CARE BY AGE

Fifty-two percent (52%) of the children who left care in 2004 spent less than 3 years in care, while 7% spent more than 7 years in care. Compared to younger children, children 16 and older spent twice as long in care.

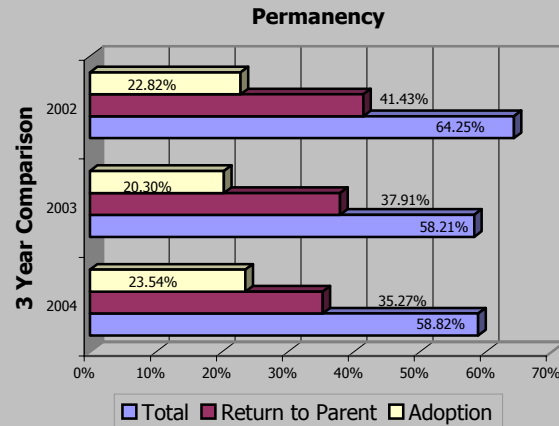


## PERMANENCY

The Federal Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) conducted in 2003 provided an opportunity for SC to identify areas of strength and develop strategies to improve services and outcomes for children and families in areas needing improvement. Permanency was determined to be one of SC's weakest areas of performance on the child welfare outcomes. Specifically, SC was weak in the areas of consistently achieving timely adoptions, ensuring stable placements for children in foster care, and holding permanency planning hearings in accordance with Federal requirements.

SC responded to the CFSR by implementing a Program Improvement Plan (PIP). As part of the PIP, SC contracted with 3 private agencies to provide adoption services to children for whom traditional recruitment has not been successful. Efforts are underway to hire contract attorneys to complete overdue termination of parental rights actions in certain counties. SC has also engaged technical support from Court Administration concerning the timeliness of permanency planning hearings.

FCRB data reveals an increase in the number of children leaving foster care without achieving permanency. Since 2002, there has been a 13% increase in the number of children who left foster care and were not returned to a parent or adopted.



## ADOPTION

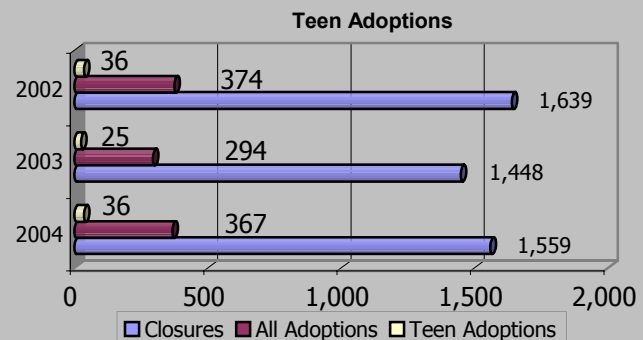
In 2004, 24% of the children who were reviewed and left foster care were adopted, compared to 21% in 2003. SC has also made progress in the number of children being adopted within 24 months. In 2004, 68 children were adopted in 24 months, compared to 48 in 2003.



Adoption	2004		2003		2002	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
TOTAL	367	23.54%	297	20.5%	374	23.63%
Regular Foster Care	358	28.9%	287	24%	358	26.4%
Medicaid Placement	9	2.8%	10	4%	16	5.7%
By 24 Months	68	18.5%	48	16.2%	45	12%

## TEEN ADOPTION

According to Review Board data, adoption is an unlikely outcome for teenagers and children placed in therapeutic foster care/residential placements. In the past 3 years, slightly less than 10% of all adoptions were teen adoptions, and less than 2% of all closures were teen adoptions. Since 2002, there has been a gradual decrease in the number of children being adopted from therapeutic foster care/residential placements. If SC is to make substantial strides in the area of Permanency, adoption must become a more frequent outcome for teens and children in therapeutic foster care placements.



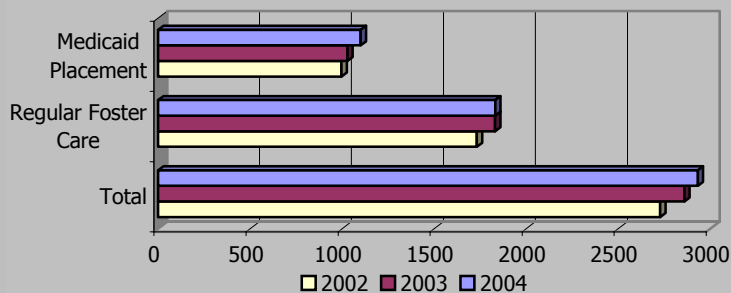
## CHILDREN REMAINING ACTIVE IN FOSTER CARE

A total of 2,933 children entered foster care prior to January 1, 2004, and remained active in the foster care system as of January 1, 2005. Since 2002, there has been a 7% increase in the total number of children remaining active in foster care.

In 2004, 38% of the children who remained active were in therapeutic foster care or a residential placement. In the past 3 years, there has been a 10% increase in the number of children remaining active in foster care in therapeutic placements. There has been a 6% increase in the number of children remaining active in regular foster care placements. Sixty percent (60%) of the children remaining active were age 10 or older. Fifty-nine percent (59%) were African-American and other minorities, and slightly more boys remained active than girls.

Active Children Remaining in Foster Care	2004	2003	2002
TOTAL NUMBER	2,933	2,860	2,729
Percent in Regular Foster Care	62%	64%	64%
Percent in Medicaid Placement	38%	36%	37%

Children Remaining in Foster Care



The stability of foster care placements and the length of time in care are systemic factors addressed in South Carolina's PIP. Both are areas in which SC has made progress. Since 2002, the number of placements experienced by children remaining active in foster care has decreased 26% and the length of time in foster care has decreased 18%.



Placements	2004	2003	2002
Number of Placements	4.3	4.9	5.4
Regular Foster Care	2.9	3.4	3.9
Medicaid Placement	6.5	7.4	7.9

Years in Care	2004	2003	2002
Number Years in Care	3.8	4.1	4.5
Regular Foster Care	3.4	3.7	4.2
Medicaid Placement	4.5	4.8	5

## SUMMARY OF REVIEWS

A total of 4,802 children were reviewed by local review boards in 2004. Since 2002, there has been a 3% increase in the number of reviews conducted and a 4% increase in the number of review board meetings held. In 2004, an average of 19 children were reviewed at each of the 441 local review board meetings.

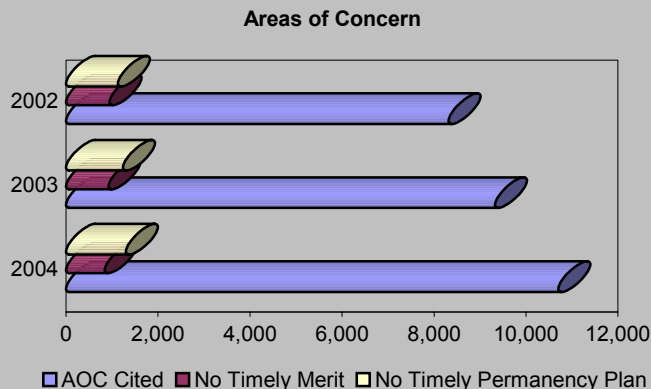


Review Data	2004	2003	2002
Number Children Reviewed	4,802	4,812	4,858
Number Reviews Held	8,410	8,284	8,192
Number Review Board Meetings	441	426	425

## AREAS OF CONCERN

Through the course of conducting case reviews, local review boards identify systemic deficiencies that are barriers to permanence for the children being reviewed. These deficiencies, or Areas of Concern, are defined as violations of law or policy.

Of the 4,802 reviews conducted in 2004, 65% had at least one Area of Concern. 10,706 Areas of Concern were identified in 2004, a 22% increase since 2002.



The lack of timely Permanency Planning hearings remains the most prevalent barrier to permanence for children in foster care. In 2004, the lack of a timely Permanency Planning hearing was identified as an Area of Concern at 1,306 reviews, a 13% increase since 2002. SC's PIP includes a strategic plan for performance improvement in this area.



Areas of Concern	2004	2003	2002
	number	number	number
AOC Cited	10,706	9,325	8,318
No Timely Probable Cause Hearing	154	160	88
No Timely Merits Hearing	844	925	948
No Timely Permanency Planning Hearing	1,306	1,242	1,132



## 2004 REVIEW BOARD RECOMMENDATIONS

The Foster Care Review Board is proud of the progress made in certain areas of the child welfare system during the past year. All stakeholders involved with the provision of services to foster children should be invigorated by the beginnings of positive change. There is still much work to be done in some areas impacting permanency for children. In an effort to address the remaining challenges described in this year's Annual Report, the State Board of Directors for the Foster Care Review Board makes the following recommendations:

**All local review board members will participate in county stakeholder meetings as part of South Carolina's Program Improvement Plan (PIP).** The Federal Child and Family Services Review conducted in 2003 provided South Carolina an opportunity to develop strategies to improve services and outcomes for children and families in specific areas. Through routine case review and exposure to various aspects of the child welfare system, local review board members have much to contribute to these meetings.

**Local review board members will meet annually with the Chief Administrative Family Court Judge in their judicial circuit to discuss barriers impacting permanency for children in foster care.** Ever increasing numbers of children not receiving timely permanency planning hearings continues to be the primary legal barrier to permanence for children in foster care in South Carolina. In conjunction with South Carolina's Court Improvement Plan, which is providing additional resources in targeted areas, local review boards have the ability and opportunity to be a change agent for improved legal services to foster children in all sixteen judicial circuits.

**The South Carolina Heart Gallery, a collaboration of state agencies and volunteers focused on creating an awareness of children in foster care in need of an adoptive family, is an initiative that will be supported by local review boards.** The Heart Gallery is a hands-on opportunity for review board members to make a difference in the lives of children for whom traditional adoption recruitment has not been successful. Thanks in part to professional photographers donating their time and services, photo gallery exhibits will be held in several locations across the state. Local review board members will offer support by assisting at the photo shoots, promoting community awareness and by attending the exhibit in their area.

**The State Board of Directors for the Foster Care Review Board will establish two standing committees to implement the recommendations of the Local / State Ad Hoc Committee and the National Ad Hoc Committee.** Both ad hoc committees were established by the State Board in 2004 to develop recommendations regarding how to promote the work of the Foster Care Review Board and its volunteers at the local, state and national level. The work facilitated by both of these committees has been instrumental in improving the visibility and advocacy efforts of the Review Board and should be on-going with permanent committee status mandated by the State Board of Directors.

**Local review board members will continue to meet at least quarterly as a group with representatives from the county Department of Social Services, the county Guardian ad Litem program and the local Foster Parent Association.** These meetings have proven to be a valuable format for discussing county specific issues impacting permanence for children in foster care. Maintaining this collaborative approach to problem-solving is critical if Review Board members are to be effective child advocates.

### **STATE BOARD OF DIRECTORS** **(by Congressional District)**

**Vernon McCurry, Member At-Large, CHAIRPERSON**

**Dot Bailey, 4th District**

**Burnet Mendelsohn, 1st District**

**Carrie Sinkler-Parker, 6th District**

**Martha Brock, 5th District**

**Louise McFarland, 2nd District**

**Anne Thayer, 3rd District**

Data contained in this Annual Report represents children reported by the SC Department of Social Services and who remained in foster care at least 4 consecutive months and reviewed by Foster Care Review.

This report was prepared by the State of South Carolina's Governor's Office, Division of Foster Care Review. For additional information, please contact Lisa S. Vosburgh at 1205 Pendleton Street, Columbia, SC 29201. Voice: 803-734-0474; Fax: 803-734-1223; E-Mail: [lvosburgh@oepp.sc.gov](mailto:lvosburgh@oepp.sc.gov); or Web: [www.govoepp.state.sc.us](http://www.govoepp.state.sc.us)